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Boulder

★ **HELENA**

Montana City

Clancy

15

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## ELKHORN

Historic Mining  
Town



### VIEW

The remnants of an early Montana historic mining town at Elkhorn State Park. This once important silver mining town boomed from the first rich ore discovery in 1870 until the fall of silver prices in 1896. Then from 1912 to 1916 the Elkhorn mine lay idle. From 1916 to 1971 the mine dumps and underground workings produced over \$1,500,000. Over the years considerable amounts of silver, gold and lead were taken from the area.

\*\*\* It is important to note that Fraternity and Gillian Halls are the only two public buildings in Elkhorn. \*\*\*

## The Elkhorn Mine's

first rich silver deposits were discovered in 1870 by Peter Wys. In 1872, the mine was purchased by Anton M. Holter. A.M. Holter was a pioneer from the Alder Gulch mining camp who later became a successful business man residing in Helena, MT. The newly purchased mine became known as the A.M. Holter Lode, or even more popularly known as the Elkhorn Mine, named after Elkhorn Gulch in which it was built. As the mine flourished the new town of Elkhorn grew.

By 1888 A.M. Holter thought the best ore had played out, so he sold the mine to an English syndicate, the London-Swansea Developing Co., for a half a million dollars. The English company made more improvements to the mine and mill, and the mine did well until the collapse of silver prices in 1896. The Elkhorn Mine was up for sale again.

In 1901 three men from Helena, John, Henry and Frank Longmaid, reopened the mine. They pumped the water out of the mine and revamped the mill. They collected ore from the mine as well as reworking the waste dumps.

## The Town of Elkhorn's

population was 2,500 for a short time during the 1890's. This was while the mining production was going strong. Elkhorn was booming!! The ethnic diversity of Elkhorn during this time was significant. Fortune seekers had come from all over the world to participate in the mining booms of the western United States, and now they were in Elkhorn.

The town of Elkhorn was rough and primitive, but it lacked the harsh violence of Bannack and Virginia City. Still, isolated incidents occurred, including bar room fights in Elkhorn's many saloons, and at least one shooting death.

In addition to its many saloons, Elkhorn also had a meeting hall, schools, doctors office, post office, butcher shop, newspaper office, livery stable, barbershop, jewelry store, candy store, and several hotels, general stores, and boarding houses.

True to the times, hardship was a way of life for the people of Elkhorn. Between the winter of 1888/89 and the following summer, an epidemic known as brain fever, diphtheria, broke out in Elkhorn. Unfortunately the children felt the brunt of the epidemic. The cemetery above town tells the sad story with the headstones of children whose birth and death dates are very close together.

The Elkhorn Mine was not the only mine near or around Elkhorn, at the time. Several other mines operated successfully, but their significance paled in the shadow of the big Elkhorn Mine. Some of these other mines were the C & D, Golden Curry, Queen and Elkhorn Skyline. During its most productive years the Elkhorn mine produced 14 million dollars in silver. It's known that considerable amounts of silver, gold, and lead were taken from the mines. By 1900 - 8,902,000 ounces of silver, 8,500 ounces of gold, and 14,000,000 pounds of lead were produced.



In 1889 the Northern Pacific Railroad built a railroad system up the steep grade from Boulder to Elkhorn in order to ship ore to the East Helena smelter, to provide passenger service, and to bring coal for the mine and mill because wood was being depleted around the town. The economic impact was hard felt in 1918, due to the decline of Elkhorn's and the Boulder Valley's prosperous activities. The rail service was cut, and by 1931 the tracks had been removed. One old time resident of Elkhorn is reported to have said, "When the train whistle was finally stilled the end of an era was at hand."



## The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

acquired two buildings on the main street of Elkhorn in the early 1980's, Fraternity and Gillian Halls. During the summer of 1993 the Department stabilized these two buildings. Both buildings have been recorded in the Historic American Buildings Survey and are now designated as a state park.

**At the present time** only a handful of residents still occupy the Elkhorn Historic Mining Town. The current residents welcome you to visit their town which has seen many a busy day in the past. Visitors can wander the streets and enjoy the remnants of this once booming town. Interpretive signs are present on significant buildings and sites. Out of respect for their privacy please remain on Main St. **It is important that visitors know that other than the two buildings owned by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Fraternity and Gillian Halls, the rest of Elkhorn is privately owned. Respect for this private property is demanded!!**

## Fraternity Hall

is a picturesque two story building on main street, and at one time was the community's gathering place for certain social activities. It was built during the 1890's. Dances were held on the second floor, while people interested in eating could do so on the first floor. Certain fraternity groups or lodges like the Masons, Knights of Pythias, I.O.O.F., and the I.O.G.I also held meetings on the second floor. Another activity that occurred in Fraternity Hall was prize fighting. Such professional boxers as Ike Hayes, Maurice Thompson, and Lloyd Locker were known to box in Fraternity Hall. Fraternity Hall also hosted public meetings, basket socials, concerts (held by the Cornish Glee Club singers), school programs, and vaudeville performances. Fraternity Hall was the site of an isolated shooting death in Elkhorn. Because of Fraternity Hall's high profile in many newspaper and magazine articles, its castellated cornice and suspended balcony has become a known symbol for the town of Elkhorn.

## Gillian Hall

was acquired at the same time as Fraternity Hall by the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. It was built during the early boom years of Elkhorn. It stands next to the larger Fraternity Hall, but its structural uniqueness gives Gillian Hall its own personality. The hall is faced with large windows and the remains of an upstairs balcony. Unfortunately there is very little written down in the history books about Gillian Hall. It is thought that Gillian Hall served either as a store or saloon, and its purpose for the old residents of Elkhorn is left to the imagination. It is also possible to enter and enjoy the first floor of Gillian Hall. The hall does have a second floor, but the staircase that once led upstairs has submitted to the harsh elements of time and climate.

## Elkhorn Historic Mining Town

is a truly unique place, and you are invited along with family and friends to come visit Elkhorn State Park. Remember to respect the buildings and private property. Please don't smoke in either of the old buildings as they are highly susceptible to fire. Primitive camping facilities are provided just outside of town by the U.S. Forest Service. Trails leading into the Elkhorn Mountains, on the Deerlodge National Forest, are near by. Come visit and enjoy!!

## Location

Elkhorn is found by following Interstate 15 to the Boulder exit. Travel seven miles south on Highway 69 towards Whitehall. Turn left at the Elkhorn sign, and travel eleven miles north on the gravel road to Elkhorn.



**1) TOM BELL'S CABIN (Private)**

Tom Bell was the great grandson of Fred Bell. Fred Bell owned and ran the livery stable across the street. Tom, his grandfather Fred W. Bell and his great grandfather, Fred are all buried in the Elkhorn cemetery. This well preserved building is a good example of the log structures built to house the men and families of early Elkhorn.

**2) THE ELKHORN SCHOOL (Private)** was built as the town's population grew, and the people recognized a need to provide education to the children of Elkhorn. This building was the first school of Elkhorn, before 1880. In 1884 the building behind this one was built as another school. At one time the Elkhorn school's student body, first through eighth grade, reached 200 students and three separate school buildings were in use.

**3) FRATERNITY HALL** is owned by the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

**4) GILLIAN HALL**, along with Fraternity Hall, is currently owned by the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, which in the summer of 1993 contracted a stabilization and preservation project to extend their structural lives.

**5) ELKHORN TRADING COMPANY STORE, (Private)** was also known as the trading post. This store sold the necessities to the residents of the town, like coffee, flour, eggs, nails, camp oil, overalls, material, tobacco, etc.

**6) HOFFMAN'S BARBERSHOP (Private)** In the early years due to the scarcity of water was the only place one could buy a tub full of water to bathe in. During the boom this little shop was quite busy with people seeking a bath and a shave.

**7) & 8) FORD'S CANDY STORE AND JEWELRY SHOP (Private)** have long been overtaken by the elements, and only interpretive signs mark their places on main street. Still their presence in Elkhorn shows that at one time the residents could afford the small and large luxuries these absent buildings once provided.

**9) SHRINER'S GENERAL STORE (Private)** like the Elkhorn Trading Co. Store, furnished needed articles to the people of Elkhorn. Traditionally, the general store was a place of gossip and loitering. People could buy things they needed, and at the same time pick up a few pieces of personal information about another resident or happening to share with a neighbor or friend.

**10) THE METROPOLITAN HOTEL**

(Private) was one of the several hotels in Elkhorn. The Metropolitan Hotel is the only one left standing on main street. This big structure was able to sleep 30 to 40 people at one time. The hotel later became a boarding house for those of who needed a more permanent place to stay.

**11) THE SALOON (Private)** was one of the many that operated in Elkhorn. These saloons were usually segregated according to ethnic and occupational differences. Disputes that occurred between the different groups were settled by the Marquis of Queensbury rules for boxing. These segregated saloons offered a gathering place to the men after a long day of hard work.

**12) THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE (Private)** due to the times, was very busy with residents suffering from illness and injury. Though health care was primitive, the doctors did their best to treat the ailments of the residents of Elkhorn. The building was also used as a school house in the 1930s.

**13) THE SHOEMAKERS SHOP (Private)** was originally owned by N. Norem. This shop provided new shoes, and shoe repair for the residents of Elkhorn. The booming town needed such craftsmen like the shoe maker. A blacksmith, butcher, jeweler, and other craftsmen were also present in Elkhorn at one time.

**14) THE COMMUNITY CHURCH (Private)** became the place of worship required by the town. Many of the men working in Elkhorn were family men, and part of a families activities included attending church services as often as possible. The church, which burned in 1912 a victim of dreaded fire, is only a vacant place on main street.

**15) & 16) THE MINER'S CLUB HOUSE AND THE SALT HOUSE (Private)** that once stood near the shoe makers shop are also only sites marked by signs. The Miner's Club House held private meetings and social gatherings of the miners, while the salt house was originally a residence and was later used to store salt.

**17) THE MINE WATCHMAN'S CABIN (Private)** served as the first doctor's office for Elkhorn, but due to its proximity to the Elkhorn Mine, it became the live-in quarters of Ed Rattell, the mine watchman. From this cabin Rattell kept a close eye on the "goings on" around the mine.

**18) THE ELKHORN MINE (Private)** first discovered by Peter Wysz in 1870, was the namesake for the town of Elkhorn. A.M. Holter turned it into the dominant producing mine of the area after its purchase in 1872. It was owned by such people as A.M. Holter, the London-Swansea Developing Company, John Henry and Frank Longmaid, and several others. The big mill is gone now, along with many other of its old buildings. Its tailings and a few remaining buildings are the only remnants.

**19) THE CEMETERY** Picket wood and iron rod fences border several grave sites. Stone and wood headstones are present to mark the unfortunate one's resting places. Many headstones belong to small children and teenagers who lost their lives in the diphtheria epidemic that struck Elkhorn in the late 1880's.

**A) Mark Moreau's - "Dog House" (Private)**

**B) Mobeck's Cabin (Private)**

**C) Old Boarding House - Spruille Brader birthplace. (Private)**

